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THE BRAIN OF INDIA

SRI AUROBINDO



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I

The time has perhaps come for the Indian mind, long pre-occupied with political and economic issues for a widening of its horizon. Such a widening is especially necessary for Bengal.

The Bengali has always led and still leads the higher thought of India, because he has eminently the gifts which are most needed for the new race that has to arise. He has the emotion and imagination which is open to the great inspirations, the mighty heart-stirring ideas that move humanity when a great step forward has to be taken. He has the invaluable gift of thinking with the heart. He has, too, a subtle brain which is able within certain

limits to catch shades of meaning and delicacies of thought, both those the logic grasps and those which escape the mere logical intellect. Above all, he has in a greater degree than other races the yet undeveloped faculty of direct knowledge, latent in humanity and now to be evolved, which is above reason and imagination, the faculty which in Sri Ramakrishna, the supreme outcome of the race, dispensed with education and commanded any knowledge he desired easily and divinely. It is a faculty which now works irregularly in humanity, unrecognised and confused by the interference of the imagination, of the limited reason and of the old associations or *samskāras* stored in the memory of the race and the individual. It cannot be made a recognised and habitual agent except by the discipline which the ancient Indian sages formulated in the science of Yoga. But certain races have the function more evolved or more ready for evolution than the generality of mankind, and it is these

that will lead in the future evolution. In addition, the race has a mighty will-power which comes from the long worship of Shakti and practice of the Tantra that has been a part of our culture for many centuries. No other people could have revolutionised its whole national character in a few years as Bengal has done. The Bengali has always worshipped the Divine Energy in her most terrible as well as in her most beautiful aspects; whether as the Beautiful or the Terrible Mother he has never shrunk from her whether in fear or in awe. When the divine force flowed into him he has never feared to yield himself up to it and follow the infinite prompting, careless whither it led. As a reward he has become the most perfect *ādhāra* of Shakti, the most capable and swiftly sensitive and responsive receptacle of the Infinite Will and Energy the world now holds. Recently that Will and Energy has rushed into him and has been lifting him to the level of his future mission and destiny. He has now to learn the secret

of drawing the Mother of Strength into himself and holding her there in a secure possession. That is why we have pointed to a religious and a spiritual awakening as the next necessity and the next inevitable development.

But along with his great possessions the Bengali has serious deficiencies. In common with the rest of India he has a great deficiency of knowledge, the result of an education meagre in quantity and absolutely vicious in method and quality. And he is inferior to other Indian races, such as the Madrasi and Maratha, in the capacity of calm, measured and comprehensive deliberation which is usually called intellect or reasoning power, and which, though it is far from the whole of thought, is essential to the completeness of thought and action. By itself the logical or reasoning intellect creates the accurate and careful scholar, the sober critic, the rationalist and cautious politician, the conservative scientist, that great mass of human intelligence which makes for slow and careful

progress. It does not create the hero and the originator, the inspired prophet, the mighty builder, the maker of nations; it does not conquer nature and destiny, lay its hand on the future, command the world. The rest of India is largely dominated by this faculty and limited by it, therefore it lags behind while Bengal rushes forward. The rest of India has feared to deliver itself to the Power that came down from above to uplift the nation; it has either denied its call or made reservations and insisted on guiding it and rein-ing it in. A few mighty men have stridden forward and carried their race or a part of it with them, but the whole race must be infused with the spirit before it can be fit for the work of the future.

On his side the Bengali, while in no way limiting the divine inrush or shortening the Titan stride, must learn to see the way he is going while he treads it. For want of a trained thought-power, he follows indeed the ideas that seize him, but he does not make them thoroughly his

own. He thinks them out, if at all, rapidly but not comprehensively, and, in consequence, though he has applied them with great energy to the circumstances immediately around him, a new set of circumstances finds him perplexed and waiting for a lead from the few men to whom he has been accustomed to look for the source of his thought and action. This is a source of weakness. For the work of the present, and still more, for the work of the future, it is imperatively necessary to create a centre of thought and knowledge which will revolutionise the brain of the nation to as great an extent as its character and outlook has been revolutionised. A new heart was necessary for our civilisation, and, though the renovation is not complete, the work that has been done in that direction will ensure its own fulfilment. A new brain is also needed, and sufficiency of knowledge for the new brain to do its work with thoroughness.

II

A new centre of thought implies a new centre of education. The system prevailing in our universities is one which ignores the psychology of man, loads the mind laboriously with numerous little packets of information carefully tied with red tape, and, by the methods used in this loading process, damages or atrophies the faculties and instruments by which man assimilates, creates, and grows in intellect, manhood and energy. The new National Education, as inaugurated in Bengal, sought immensely to enlarge the field of knowledge to which the student was introduced, and in so far as it laid stress on experiment and observation, employed the natural and easy instrument of the vernacular and encouraged the play of thought on the subject of study, corrected the habit

of spoiling the instruments of knowledge by the use of false methods. But many of the vicious methods and ideas employed by the old system were faithfully cherished by the new, and the domination of the Council by men wedded to the old lines was bound to spell a most unfavourable effect on the integrity of the system in its most progressive features. Another vital defect of the new education was that it increased the amount of information the student was required to absorb without strengthening the body and brain sufficiently to grapple with the increased mass of intellectual toil, and it shared with the old system the defect of ignoring the psychology of the race. The mere inclusion of the matter of Indian thought and culture in the field of knowledge does not make a system of education Indian, and the instruction given in the Bengal National College was only an improved European system, not Indian or National. Another error which has to be avoided and to which careless minds are liable,

is the reactionary idea that in order to be national, education must reproduce the features of the old *tol* system of Bengal. It is not eighteenth century India, the India which by its moral and intellectual deficiencies gave itself into the keeping of foreigners, that we have to revive, but the spirit, ideals and methods of the ancient and mightier India in a yet more effective form and with a more modern organisation.

What was the secret of that gigantic intellectuality, spirituality and super-human moral force which we see pulsating in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, in the ancient philosophy, in the supreme poetry, art, sculpture and architecture of India? What was at the basis of the incomparable public works and engineering achievement, the opulent and exquisite industries, the great triumphs of science, scholarship, jurisprudence, logic, metaphysics, the unique social structure? What supported the heroism and self-abandonment of the Kshattriya, the Sikh and the Rajput, the unconquerable national vitality

and endurance? What was it that stood behind that civilisation second to none, in the massiveness of its outlines or the perfection of its details? Without a great and unique discipline involving a perfect education of soul and mind, a result so immense and persistent would have been impossible. It would be an error to look for the secret of Aryan success in the details of the instruction given in the old Ashrams and universities so far as they have come down to us. We must know what was the principle and basis on which the details were founded. We shall find the secret of their success in a profound knowledge of human psychology and its subtle application to the methods of intellectual training and instruction.

At the basis of the old Aryan system was the all-important discipline of Brahmacharya. The first necessity for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure is to provide a foundation strong enough to bear it. Those systems of education which start from an insufficient know-

ledge of man, think they have provided a satisfactory foundation when they have supplied the student with a large or well-selected mass of information on the various subjects which comprise the best part of human culture at the time. The school gives the materials, it is for the student to use them,—this is the formula. But the error here is fundamental. Information cannot be the foundation of intelligence, it can only be part of the material out of which the knower builds knowledge, the starting-point, the nucleus of fresh discovery and enlarged creation. An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge, is no education. The various faculties of memory, judgment, imagination, perception, reasoning, which build the edifice of thought and knowledge for the knower, must not only be equipped with their fit and sufficient tools and materials, but trained to bring fresh materials and use more skilfully those of which they are in possession. And the foundation of the structure they have to build, can only

be the provision of a fund of force and energy sufficient to bear the demands of a continually growing activity of the memory, judgment and creative power. Where is that energy to be found?

The ancient Aryans knew that man was not separate from the universe, but only a homogeneous part of it, as a wave is part of the ocean. An infinite energy, Prakriti, Maya or Shakti, pervades the world, pours itself into every name and form, and the clod, the plant, the insect, the animal, the man are, in their phenomenal existence, merely more or less efficient *ādhāras* of this Energy. We are each of us a dynamo into which waves of that energy have been generated and stored, and are being perpetually conserved, used up and replenished. The same force which moves in the star and the planet, moves in us, and all our thought and action are merely its play and born of the complexity of its functionings. There are processes by which man can increase his capacity as an *ādhāra*. There are other processes by

which he can clear of obstructions the channel of communication between himself and the universal energy and bring greater and greater stores of it pouring into his soul and brain and body. This continual improvement of the *ādhāra* and increase in quantity and complexity of action of the informing energy, is the whole aim of evolution. When that energy is the highest in kind and the fullest in amount of which the human *ādhāra* is capable, and the *ādhāra* itself is trained utterly to bear the inrush and play of the energy, then is a man *siddha*, the fulfilled or perfect man, his evolution is over and he has completed in the individual that utmost development which the mass of humanity is labouring towards through the ages.

If this theory be correct, the energy at the basis of the operation of intelligence must be in ourselves and it must be capable of greater expansion and richer use to an extent practically unlimited. And this also must be a sound principle,

that the more we can increase and enrich the energy, the greater will be potentially the range, power and activity of the functions of our mind and the consequent vigour of our intellectuality and the greatness of our achievement. This was the first principle on which the ancient Aryans based their education and one of the chief processes which they used for the increased storage of energy, was the practice of Brahmacharya.

III

The practice of Brahmacharya is the first and most necessary condition of increasing the force within and turning it to such uses as may benefit the possessor or mankind. All human energy has a physical basis. The mistake made by European materialism is to suppose the basis to be everything and confuse it with the source. The source of life and energy is not material but spiritual, but the basis, the foundation on which the life and energy stand and work, is physical. The ancient Hindus clearly recognised this distinction between *kāraṇa* and *pratiṣṭhā*, the north pole and the south pole of being. Earth or gross matter is the *pratiṣṭhā*, Brahman or spirit is the *kāraṇa*. To raise up the physical to the spiritual is Brahmacharya, for by the meeting of the two the energy

which starts from one and produces the other is enhanced and fulfils itself.

This is the metaphysical theory. The application depends on a right understanding of the physical and psychological conformation of the human receptacle of energy. The fundamental physical unit is the *retas*, in which the *tejas*, the heat and light and electricity in a man, is involved and hidden. All energy is latent in the *retas*. This energy may be either expended physically or conserved. All passion, lust, desire wastes the energy by pouring it, either in the gross form or a sublimated subtler form, out of the body. Immorality in act throws it out in the gross form; immorality of thought in the subtle form. In either case there is waste, and unchastity is of the mind and speech as well as of the body. On the other hand, all self-control conserves the energy in the *retas*, and conservation always brings with it increase. But the needs of the physical body are limited and the excess of energy must create

a surplus which has to turn itself to some use other than the physical. According to the ancient theory *retas* is *jala* or water, full of light and heat and electricity, in one word, of *tejas*. The excess of the *retas* turns first into heat or *tapas* which stimulates the whole system, and it is for this reason that all forms of self-control and austerity are called *tapas* or *tapasyā* because they generate the heat, or stimulus which is a source of powerful action and success; secondly, it turns to *tejas* proper, light, the energy which is at the source of all knowledge; thirdly, it turns to *vidyut* or electricity, which is at the basis of all forceful action whether intellectual or physical. In the *vidyut* again is involved the *ojas*, or *prāṇaśakti*, the primal energy which proceeds from ether. The *retas* refining from *jala* to *tapas*, *tejas* and *vidyut* and from *vidyut* to *ojas*, fills the system with physical strength, energy and brain-power and in its last form of *ojas* rises to the brain and informs it with that primal energy which is the most

refined form of matter and nearest to spirit. It is *ojas* that creates a spiritual force or *virya*, by which a man attains to spiritual knowledge, spiritual love and faith, spiritual strength. It follows that the more we can by Brahmacharya increase the store of *tapas*, *tejas*, *vidyut* and *ojas*, the more we shall fill ourselves with utter energy for the works of the body, heart, mind and spirit.

This view of the human soul was not the whole of the knowledge on which ancient Hinduism based its educational discipline. In addition it had the view that all knowledge is within and has to be evoked by education rather than instilled from outside. The constitution of man consists of three principles of nature *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, the comprehensive, active and passive elements of universal action, which, in one of their thousandfold aspects, manifest as knowledge, passion and ignorance. *Tamas* is a constitutional dullness or passivity which obscures the knowledge within and creates ignorance, mental

inertia, slowness, forgetfulness, disinclination to study, inability to grasp and distinguish. *Rajas* is an undisciplined activity which obscures knowledge by passion, attachment, prejudgment, predilection and wrong ideas. *Sattva* is an illumination which reveals the hidden knowledge and brings it to the surface where the observation can grasp and the memory record it. This conception of the constitution of the knowing faculty made the removal of *tamas*, the disciplining of *rajas* and the awakening of *sattva* the main problem of the teacher. He had to train the student to be receptive of illumination from within. The disciplining of *rajas* was effected by a strict moral discipline which induced a calm, clear, receptive state of mind, free from intellectual self-will and pride and the obscuration of passion,—the famous discipline of the *brahmacārin* which was the foundation of Aryan culture and Aryan morale; and the interference of wrong ideas was sought to be removed by strict mental submission to the teacher

during the receptive period, when the body of ascertained knowledge or right ideas already in man's possession was explained to him and committed to memory. The removal of *tamas* was effected by the discipline of moral purity, which awakened the energy of *tejas* and electricity in the system and by the power of *tapasyā* trained it to be a reservoir of mental force and clarity. The awakening of illumination was actively effected by the triple method of repetition, meditation and discussion. *Avṛtti* or repetition was meant to fill the recording part of the mind with the *śabda* or words, so that the *artha* or meaning might of itself rise from within: needless to say, a mechanical repetition was not likely to produce this effect. There must be that clear still receptivity and that waiting upon the word or thing with the contemplative part of the mind which is what the ancient Indians meant by *dhyāna* or meditation. All of us have felt, when studying a language, difficulties which seemed insoluble while grappling with a

text suddenly melt away and a clear understanding arise without assistance from book or teacher after putting away the book from our mind for a brief period. Many of us have experienced also the strangeness of taking up a language or subject, after a brief discontinuance, to find that we understand it much better than when we took it up, know the meanings of words we had never met with before and can explain sentences which, before we discontinued the study, would have baffled our understanding. This is because the *jñātā* or knower within has had his attention called to the subject and has been busy in the interval drawing upon the source of knowledge within in connection with it. This experience is only possible to those whose *sāttvic* or illuminative element has been powerfully aroused or consciously or unconsciously trained to action by the habit of intellectual clarity and deep study. The highest reach of the *sāttvic* development is when one can dispense often or habitually with outside

aids, the teacher or the text book, grammar and dictionary and learn a subject largely or wholly from within. But this is only possible to the Yogin by a successful prosecution of the discipline of Yoga.

IV

We have stated, as succinctly as is consistent with clearness, the main psychological principles on which the ancient Indians based their scheme of education. By the training of Brahmacharya they placed all the energy of which the system was capable and which could be spared from bodily functions, at the service of the brain. In this way they not only strengthened the *medhā* or grasping power, the *dhī* or subtlety and swiftness of thought conception, the memory and the creative intellectual force, making the triple force of memory, invention, judgment comprehensive and analytic, but they greatly enlarged the range, no less than the intensity, of the absorbing, storing and generative mental activities. Hence those astonishing feats of memory, various comprehension and ver-

satility of creative work of which only a few extraordinary intellects have been capable in Occidental history, but which in ancient India were common and usual. Mr. Gladstone was considered to be the possessor of an astonishing memory because he could repeat the whole of Homer's Iliad, beginning from any passage suggested to him and flowing on as long as required; but to a Brahmin of the old times this would have been a proof of a capacity neither unusual nor astonishing, but rather, petty and limited. The many-sidedness of an Eratosthenes or the range of a Herbert Spencer have created in Europe admiring or astonished comment; but the universality of the ordinary curriculum in ancient India was for every student and not for the exceptional few, and it implied, not a tasting of many subjects after the modern plan, but the thorough mastery of all. The original achievement of a Kalidasa accomplishing the highest in every line of poetic creation is so incredible to the European mind that it has

been sought to cleave that mighty master of harmonies into a committee of three. Yet it is paralleled by the accomplishment in philosophy of Shankara in a short life of thirty-two years and dwarfed by the universal mastery of all possible spiritual knowledge and experience of Sri Ramakrishna in our own era. These instances are not so common as the others, because pure creative genius is not common; but in Europe they are, with a single modern exception, non-existent. The highest creative intellects in Europe have achieved sovereignty by limitation, by striving to excel only in one field of a single intellectual province or at most in two; when they have been versatile it has been by sacrificing height to breadth. But in India it is the greatest who have been the most versatile and passed from one field of achievement to another without sacrificing an inch of their height or an iota of their creative intensity, easily, unfalteringly, with an assured mastery. This easy and unfailing illumination crowning the unfail-

ing energy created by Brahmacharya was due to the discipline which developed *sattva* or inner illumination. This illumination makes the acquisition of knowledge and all other intellectual operations easy, spontaneous, swift, decisive and comparatively unfatiguing to body or brain. In these two things lies the secret of Aryan intellectual achievement, Brahmacharya and *sāttvic* development created the brain of India: it was perfected by Yoga.

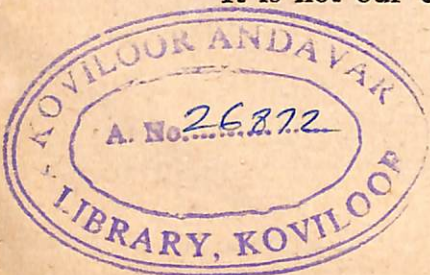
It is a common complaint that our students are too heavily burdened with many subjects and the studying of many books. The complaint is utterly true and yet it is equally true that the range of studies is pitifully narrow and the books read miserably few. What is the reason of this paradox, the justification of these two apparently contradictory truths? It is this, that we neglect the basis and proceed at once to a superstructure small in bulk, disproportionately heavy in comparison with that bulk, and built on a foundation too weak to bear even the paltry and

meagre edifice of our imparted knowledge. The Indian brain is still in potentiality what it was; but it is being damaged, stunted and defaced. The greatness of its innate possibilities is hidden by the greatness of its surface deterioration. The old system hampered it with study in a foreign language which was not even imperfectly mastered at a time when the student was called upon to learn in that impossible medium a variety of alien and unfamiliar subjects. In this unnatural process it was crippled by the disuse of judgment, observation, comprehension and creation, and the exclusive reliance on the deteriorating relics of the ancient Indian memory. Finally, it was beggared and degraded by having to deal with snippets and insufficient packets of information instead of being richly stored and powerfully equipped.

The new system of National Education sought to undo the evil by employing the mother-tongue, restoring the use of the disused intellectual functions and provid-

ing for a richer and more real equipment of information, of the substance of knowledge and the materials for creation. If it could not triumphantly succeed, that was partly because it had to deal with minds already vitiated by the old system and not often with the best even of these, because its teachers had themselves seldom a perfect grasp of the requirements of the new system, and because its controllers and directors were men of the old school who clung to familiar shibboleths and disastrous delusions. But in the system itself there was a defect, which, though it would matter less in other epochs or other countries, is of primary importance in such periods of transition when bricks have to be made out of straw and the work now done will determine the future achievement of our nation. While calling itself national, it neglected the very foundation of the great achievement of our forefathers and especially the perfection of the instrument of knowledge.

It is not our contention that the actual



system of ancient instruction should be restored in its outward features,—a demand often made by fervid lovers of the past. Many of them are not suited to modern requirements. But its fundamental principles are for all time and its discipline can only be replaced by the discovery of a still more effective discipline, such as European education does not offer us. The object of these articles has been to indicate the nature and psychological ideas of the old system and point out its essential relation of cause and effect to the splendid achievement of our ancestors. How its principles can be reapplied or be completed and to some extent replaced by a still deeper psychology and a still more effective discipline is a subject fit for separate treatment.